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TAGS: PREL EU IS NL PK

SUBJECT: DUTCH CANDIDATE FOR EU MIDDLE EAST ENVOY

Classified By: POL COUNSELOR MARY E. DALY FOR REASONS 1.5 B AND D

¶1. (U) Noting that Marcel Kurpershoek is one of two finalists to replace Angel Moratinos, we want to share our impressions and some biographic details. Kurpershoek currently is resident in Pakistan, where he serves as Dutch ambassador to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Previously, he headed the MFA's middle east bureau. He also has served in Damascus, Cairo, Riyadh, and Brussels. Kurpershoek is widely respected for his expertise in the Middle East. He taught at Leiden University and has published frequently, including a book based on his experiences living with Bedouins in Saudi Arabia, and several works on Arab literature.

¶2. (S/N) In Pol Counselor's last conversation with Kurpershoek before his departure for Pakistan, Kurpershoek expressed great sympathy for the Palestinians. Although he obviously disapproved of terrorism as a political tool, he cited the very difficult conditions under which Palestinians live and their hopelessness as naturally leading to terrorism. Similarly, he was of the opinion that we were expecting more from Arafat than Arafat could possibly deliver. The onus, he said, was on PM Sharon to stop settlements and offer some hope to the Palestinians for a political settlement. Some of Kupershoek's statements no doubt were deliberately calibrated to jolt the American pol counselor. That said, you can assume that if he gets the post, his bias will be at least slightly toward the Palestinians. The Israeli DCM (protect) in The Hague put it succinctly, "he has the right curriculum vitae for the job and the right contacts but I personally would not be happy. He is not the best on even handedness and is not the Dutchman the Israeli embassy would like to see in the job." According to the Israeli DCM, Kurpershoek's contacts with the Israeli left are particular good. Kurpershoek is allegedly the man behind the efforts of former FM van Aartsen to start up "secret talks" in The Hague among Israelis and Palestinians early in 2002.

¶3. (S/N) A senior official at the MFA says that the Dutch government hopes Kurpershoek gets the job in order to strengthen the Dutch role in EU deliberations on the Middle East. The Dutch government overall has been a very helpful voice within the EU for keeping EU policy on the Middle East in line with that of the U.S. and for ensuring a balanced approach toward Israel. FM de Hoop Scheffer is considered "pro-Israel," and the government has successfully stopped several efforts in parliament to ban the transport of weapons to Israel via Schiphol.

SOBEL